

Theme: *Light, Bravery, and Belonging: An Introduction to the Maccabees*

I. Learning Goals

Students will:

1. Understand a simplified version of the Maccabees story
2. Explore the idea of bringing “light” to the world through kindness and inclusion.
3. Participate in hands-on sensory activities that reinforce the story.

II. Materials

- Picture-book or child-friendly retelling of the Hanukkah story
- Blocks, Magna-Tiles, playdough or modeling clay
- Construction paper strips, glue, markers
- Flameless tea lights
- Dreidels (or pictures of dreidels)
- Visual schedule for the lesson and expectations
- Sensory supports: fidgets, wiggle cushions, headphones, calm corner items

III. Lesson Flow

1. Welcome Ritual (3 minutes)

- **Welcome Song**

Begin with: “*Shalom everybody, how do you do?*”

Invite each child to say their name as the group welcomes them.

- **Expectations**

Say: “I can’t wait to learn with you! Remember — we listen, we use kind words, and we use gentle hands and feet.” Point to simple visuals and keep them on the board as reminders.

- **Menorah Introduction**

Show a picture of a menorah and ask:

“What do you think this is?”

Model a quick think-aloud: “Hmmm... I see candles. I wonder what we might talk about today?” Repeat back all student ideas with excitement.

2. Storytime: “Who Were the Maccabees?” (5-10 minutes)

“Friends, today we’re going to hear a very old and very special story about a group of brave Jewish people called the Maccabees. Can you say that with me? *Mac-a-bees!* Great job! it’s a fun word to say and an important part of our history.”

Use a picture book, printed visuals, or simple drawings to introduce the characters and settings. You can retell the story in your own words, using simple language:

Long ago, there was a king named Antiochus who made rules that were not fair to the Jewish people. He said they couldn’t pray the way they wanted or celebrate their Jewish traditions. A family called the Maccabees—led by Judah Maccabee—stood up and said, ‘We want to be free to be Jewish!’

The Maccabees were not the strongest or the biggest group, but they worked together, cared for each other, and believed in doing what was right. After a long time, they were able to return to the Temple in Jerusalem. But when they got there, it was messy and broken, and they only had one small jar of oil—just enough to last one day.

But something amazing happened. The oil didn’t last for just one day... it lasted for eight whole nights. That’s why we light the Hanukkah candles — to remember the bravery, the hope, and the miracle of the Maccabees.

Supports:

- Use visuals for characters, Temple, candles, jar of oil, etc and use as you say the story.
- Provide a fidget or flexible seating for anyone who listens better with movement.

3. Sensory Building Activity: “Let’s Rebuild the Temple!” (12–15 minutes)

Students choose from three different stations that are pre-set up around the class.

1. Blocks to build a Temple
2. Clay to sculpt a menorah
3. Collage with blue/yellow paper to create light

Students can rotate stations every 3 or 5 minutes, or if a child chooses one and wants to be there the whole time, let them. If a child does not want to participate, do not force them, but encourage them to play near the learning activity or do something that is similar to the lesson

Supports:

- Provide hand-over-hand modeling when needed.
 - Allow students to work on the floor, at a table, or on a wobble seat.
 - Walk around to assess support needs.
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4. Movement Break: “Light Dance!” (3–5 minutes)

Play soft, calming music and gently dim the lights to signal a transition back to the group.

Invite students to settle into the circle or rug with welcoming, low-pressure language:

“Ok friends, you did such thoughtful work building your own Temples. Now we’re going to pretend to become candles. Everyone gets to choose how their candle moves. There’s no one right way.”

Guided Movements:

- **Sway like a candle flame** — soft, gentle side-to-side movements.
- **Jump like tiny sparks** — small hops or light bounces.
- **Stretch tall like the shamash candle** — reach up high and grow as tall as you can.

You can cue each movement slowly, pausing in between so students can follow at their own pace.

5. Sensory Light Experience (5 minutes)

Keep lights dim. Ask students to sit. Distribute flameless candles for each student to hold.

- “Close your eyes and feel what light might feel like—warm, calm, comforting.”
- Students can hold candles or place them on their creations.
- If a child does not want to take a candle, do not force them.

Supports:

- Provide sunglasses or dimmer seating for light-sensitive students.
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6. Whole-Group Reflection: “How Can We Be Light?” (5 minutes)

Turn the lights back on and ask:

“What is a light? Is it warm or cold? Bright or dark?”

Use clear hand gestures for each option and have students call out their answers.

Continue with:

“Do you think a light is helpful? If *you* are a light to a friend, what might that mean?”

Creative Reflection Activity

Set out drawing paper, crayons, and markers. Invite students to draw — or tell you what to draw — to show what “being a light to a friend” could look like.

Students can respond using:

- Words
- Pictures
- Hand signals (thumbs up, heart hands)

Tip: Participation should always be optional. Observing is a valid way to learn.

IV. Accommodations & Supports

- Provide visual schedules & timers.
 - Pre-teach key vocabulary with picture cards.
 - Allow flexible seating.
 - Use repetition and predictable routines.
 - Allow non-verbal participation (pointing, gestures, pictures).
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V. Optional Extensions

- Dreidel stations: matching letters, spinning practice, sensory bin of gelt.
- Create a class “Book of Light” where each student contributes their drawing of how to be a light to friends and family.