

# The Discovery Jewish Festivals Curriculum

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# Dear Educators,

I am delighted to share The Discovery Jewish Festivals Curriculum.

This comprehensive curriculum is designed as a 'spiral curriculum' whereby new learning is built on the foundations of existing knowledge and experiences. Previous learning is reviewed and core knowledge is reinforced and solidified by integrating it into previous learning. The pupils focus on new aspects and themes of the Jewish festivals each year, to deepen their understanding and limit repetition.

Each lesson includes clear and structured learning objectives, developed to involve the pupils' whole selves, to know 🧠, to appreciate ❤️, and to apply 🖐️ their learning to their lives. Every lesson in each year group is themed and includes a variety of thought-provoking, creative and hands-on activities, designed with a multi-sensory approach, to engage pupils with different learning styles.

The curriculum is designed to enliven Jewish learning. It offers an experiential approach in which pupils are encouraged to be active learners and think, explore, discover and appreciate their Jewish heritage and traditions, as a foundation to a lifelong journey in Jewish learning. These lessons encourage a joyous and meaningful exploration of the rhythm of the Jewish calendar. Feedback or suggestions are welcome:  
[TheJEdNet@gmail.com](mailto:TheJEdNet@gmail.com)

This resource was originally developed for United Synagogue Chadarim and Hebrew schools in the UK, in association with Tribe. I am grateful to Sarah Alevsky for her insightful educational wisdom and to Lloyd Schroeder for working with me on the curriculum design.

*This curriculum is dedicated to all Jewish Educators who devote their time  
to pass on Jewish values and knowledge to the next generation.*

**Chayli Fehler**

United Synagogue Children's Education Manager  
Aleph Learning Centre Director  
JEdNet Founder

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# The Discovery Jewish Festivals Curriculum

## The Curriculum Methodology

### The Spiral Approach

*How many times do you walk into a classroom and hear, "We know everything about this festival", or "I already learnt this before..."?*

Unlike other subjects, the Jewish festivals are taught every year, in every class. The spiral method constantly engages the pupils in new learning without repetition of topics. It builds upon previous knowledge to deepen the pupils' understanding and connection to the festival.

The spiral approach intensifies the complexity of the learning. It allows a progression from concrete information to more abstract ideas, utilising developing cognitive skills to help pupils understand increasingly complex concepts. New learning is built on the foundations of existing knowledge, and is reinforced and solidified by integrating it into previous learning. The curriculum extends this concept of learning into the experiences in the classroom.

In the younger classes, the focus is on stories, symbols, home observances and celebrations. As the pupils progress, the learning becomes more detailed, with additional historical context of the stories and a deeper understanding of the festival observances. In the older classes, there is a focus on the relevance of the traditions in today's society. The learners explore the abstract overarching themes of the festival and are introduced to primary texts. Activities also become more complex to reflect the pupils increased independence and cognitive skills.

**“Great is study  
for it leads to  
action.”**  
(Kiddushin 40b)

### The Experiential Approach

*How many times have you heard, "What is the point of learning this"? "What does it have to do with me"?*

Experiential education engages learners in direct experiences in order to increase knowledge and develop skills. Through hands-on experiences and focused reflection, pupils can gain appreciation and understanding of the concepts, and find personal relevance.

The learning includes hands-on activities, offering a 'doing' aspect not only to create memorable experiences, but for pupils to also experience the learning. The themes and values of the festivals are explored in depth, and pupils are encouraged to find personal meaning and integrate this into their lives.

The experiential approach directs the learning from the theory to the practical; from the abstract to the actual. In this curriculum, the classroom becomes a place where pupils can explore and experience their Judaism.

**“I hear and I  
forget; I see  
and I remember;  
I do and I  
understand.”**  
(Chinese Proverb)



## The Multi-Sensory Approach

*Children learn differently. Some pupils excel and enjoy certain activities while others find them difficult. How can we teach pupils in a way in which everyone participates and learns?*

The multi-sensory approach is effective in promoting learning by using various intelligences and hands-on methods of engagement. By incorporating a variety of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile activities in the lessons, every pupil can be engaged and learn. The activities used in the curriculum include a rich variety of experiences using all the senses, including drama, art, discussions and active games. The learning also extends outside the classroom to the synagogue, and outdoors.




**“ Educate each child according to their own way, so that when they are old, they will not depart from it. ”**

(Mishlei 22)

## The Whole Person Learning Approach

There are many models of whole person learning. This curriculum uses the categories of Head (know), Heart (appreciate), and Self (apply) as the ways in which the learning can 'live' in a person. The learning objectives of each lesson are built upon these aspects, and are reflected in the language used.

The learning objectives are not limited to information. For the learning to have an impact on the pupils, the knowledge should be integrated into other aspects of their lives and find expression in feelings and actions.

	<b>Know</b>	<b>Know and understand essential knowledge and skills.</b>
	<b>Appreciate</b>	<b>Appreciate, explore and find personal relevance in the concepts and values.</b>
	<b>Apply</b>	<b>Be able to act upon the knowledge, values and skills.</b>

## The Curriculum Structure

**Previous Knowledge:** This is the knowledge that the pupils should already know about the specific festival, based on previous years' learning. The previous learning assessment activity reviews what was learnt in previous years. Educators should recap this knowledge before moving onto the new learning objectives to ensure pupils are familiar with the necessary prior information.



**Learning Objectives:** The learning objectives include knowledge of information, understanding of concepts, appreciation of values or ideas, and/or acquiring a certain skill. It is advisable that at the end of the lesson, the educator refers back to the objectives to evaluate what the pupils have learnt and understood.

**Themes:** Every lesson revolves around a theme. The themes of all the other year groups are also noted on the page, which enables educators to have a clear understanding of what their class have learnt in the past, and what the focus will be in the future. The curriculum is designed so that educators can refer back to knowledge and concepts that the pupils have learnt in previous years.

**Suggested Activities:** The lesson is composed of a variety of activities, which relate to the specific learning objectives. There will not always be time for educators to do all the activities. Educators can choose activities, based on the class size and setting and the resources available. It is advised that the teachers choose a variety of activities to cater for the various learning styles of the pupils.

**Tunes and Tefillot:** Every year, pupils are introduced to popular songs and important prayers and blessings associated with the festival. A reminder of previously learnt songs and tefillot are included in each lesson, with new songs or tefillot in bold. Lyrics of the songs are provided at the end of each section.

**Reflective Questions:** The pupils are encouraged to reflect and think about what they have learnt through the reflection questions provided. The open ended questions are designed to promote independent thinking and stimulate further questions and discussions.

**Jewish Values:** The curriculum focuses on different values for each festival. The values were chosen for their importance and relevance to the festival. Along with a description of the value, there are age appropriate suggestions of how to put this value into action, with a thinking  and doing  activity. Educators can add further emphasis on the Jewish value if times allows.



## These 10 icons represent 10 types of activities or methods of teaching:



An activity to review what was learnt in previous years on this topic. In a double lesson, the previous learning assessment is in the first lesson.



An activity to launch the lesson, capture the attention of the pupils and prepare them for the content of the lesson.



A hands-on activity to reinforce the learning objectives.



An arts and craft project to add a creative element to the lesson.



A drama based activity in which pupils act out scenarios to explore a story or concept.



A clip of a film that reinforces the learning and can be used as a trigger for the discussion.



A discussion, conversation or debate to engage pupils and deepen their understanding.



A story or picture book connected to the festival or theme of the lesson.



A text-based activity, exploring the festival or prayers from text sources.




A wrap up activity to assess pupils have understood and processed their learning.

## Adapting the Curriculum

**The Design:** This curriculum is specifically designed for Hebrew school pupils, but can be easily adapted to other school settings. Some smaller schools may combine classes, and the most important aspects of each year group's objectives can be selected. This curriculum can be used as an outline and educators are encouraged to add their own notes in the space provided within the activities section.

**Classroom Setting:** Pupils should ideally sit at tables or desks that can be easily moved into different configurations, with space on the floor for them to sit, or play a game. The ideal setup for discussions is in a circle or square, where all the participants can see and hear each other easily. It is important that the pupils move around the room over the course of the lesson. A board or a writing pad should be placed in the front of the room, visible to all the pupils. There are activities in the lesson plans where pupils will be divided into pairs or small groups to work together.

**Resources Needed:** These are the materials needed for each lesson. Ensure to check the resource list while preparing the lesson. A paper clip icon  indicates that this resource is available to download from [www.jednet.org](http://www.jednet.org). Further resources will be added, and educators are encouraged to upload their own resources to this database of shared Jewish teaching resources.

**Technology:** It is important to keep Jewish learning as exciting and engaging as possible. If educators have access to interactive smart boards, tablets or laptops, Jewish software and other tech resources can be used to enhance the learning.

**Reminder:** If any craft or activity involves food, educators should check for allergies. Educators should also ensure that adequate safety measures are in place for all crafts and activities and remember that any photos taken will need to have parent's consent.

**Enhance the Learning:** Finally, this formal curriculum is only a part of the overall syllabus. In conjunction with formal classroom teaching, schools are encouraged to offer a range of extra-curricular educational activities, including interactive 'Funday Sundays' and relevant trips that provide opportunities for pupils to enjoy and experience Jewish life in an informal environment.

# The Discovery Jewish Festivals Curriculum Map

	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Value
<b>Rosh Hashanah</b>	New Beginnings Sweet New Year	Rosh Hashanah Symbols Mitzvot	The Shofar Counting our Deeds	Teshuvah, Tefillah, Tzedakah New Resolutions	Celebrating Creation Avinu Malkenu	Day of Judgment Day of Prayer	Reflecting & Returning The Machzor	Reflection
<b>Yom Kippur</b>	Saying Sorry	Yom Kippur Symbols	The Holiest Day	Yonah	Purity & Prayer	Day of Forgiveness	Day of Atonement	Forgiveness
<b>Succot</b>	The Succah	Succot Symbols	Lulav & Etrog	Arba'ah Minim & Ushpizin	Building a Succah	Simchah of Succot	Unity of Succot	Gratitude
<b>Shemini Atzeret Simchat Torah</b>	Simchat Torah Celebrations	Simchat Torah Symbols	Writing a Torah	The Torah Cycle	Shemini Atzeret	Torah Study	Joy of Torah	Joy
<b>Chanukah</b>	Story of Chanukah Celebrating Chanukah	Chanukah Characters Chanukah Symbols	The Beit Hamikdash Miracle of the Oil	The Jewish Victory The Chanukiah	The Maccabees Prayer & Faith	Jewish Heroes Publicising the Miracle	Hellenism vs Judaism Jewish Pride	Courage
<b>Tu B'Shvat</b>	Planting & Growing	Blessing our Fruit	Appreciation for Trees	The Seven Fruits of Israel	Environmental Responsibility	Rosh Hashanah for Trees	Farming in Israel	Respecting the Environment
<b>Purim</b>	Story of Purim Celebrating Purim	Purim Characters Purim Symbols	The Royal Palace Month of Adar	The Purim Plot Customs & Mitzvot	Purim in Persia The Four Mitzvot	The Hidden Miracle The Queens Courage	Providence & Opportunities The Megillah	Faith
<b>Pesach</b>	Story of Pesach Pesach Foods Celebrating Pesach	Pesach Characters Seder Symbols Pesach at Home	Leaving Egypt The Seder Table Preparing for Pesach	Retelling the Story The Seder Plate Chametz & Matzah	Exodus The Seder Kosher for Pesach	Freedom & Slavery The First Pesach Pesach Traditions	Expressing Gratitude The Haggadah Transmission of Tradition	Remembrance
<b>Lag B'Omer</b>	Celebrating Lag B'Omer	Lag B'Omer Symbols	A Day of Friendship	Rabbi Akiva	The Omer	Character Counts	Respecting Differences	Friendship
<b>Yom Ha'atzma'ut</b>	Birthday of Israel	Israel Symbols	The Kotel	Map of Israel	Faces of Israel	Leadership & Innovation	Hope & Statehood	Jewish Pride & Unity
<b>Yom Yerushalayim</b>	The Kotel	Jerusalem Symbols	Jerusalem the Capital	Ancient Jerusalem	Modern Jerusalem	The Old City	The City of Hope	Community
<b>Shavuot</b>	Celebrating Shavuot	Shavuot Symbols	Giving of the Torah	Customs & Mitzvot	Gift of the Torah	The 10 Commandments	Transmitting the Torah	Torah Learning