The Festival of Lights: Hanukkah

Learning objective: To understand the origins, traditions, and significance of Hanukkah for Jewish people.

Read the text carefully and answer the questions below in full sentences.

Hanukkah is a joyful eight-day Jewish festival, often called the Festival of Lights. It celebrates a historical event from over 2,000 years ago, when the Maccabees reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Upon entering the temple, they found only enough sacred oil to light the lamp for one day. However, a miracle occurred; the oil lasted for eight full days. Today, Jewish families commemorate this by lighting a special nine-branched candelabrum called a menorah. Each night of the festival, an additional candle is lit until all eight are glowing brightly. The ninth candle, the shamash, is used to light the others. During Hanukkah, families enjoy delicious foods fried in oil, such as latkes (potato pancakes) and doughnuts, to remind them of the oil that lasted so long. Children often play games with a spinning top known as a dreidel, and families exchange small gifts or coins. It is a time for reflection, gratitude, and celebrating the triumph of light over darkness, bringing warmth and happiness to homes during the cold winter months.

Word bank: Menorah · Maccabees · miracle · dedication · tradition · dreidel

1. What is the name of the special nine-branched candelabrum used during Hanukkah, and what is the purpose of the ninth candle? (2 marks)

2. Identify two types of food mentioned in the text that are traditionally eaten during the festival. (2 marks)

3. Why do you think Jewish families choose to eat foods fried in oil during Hanukkah? (2 marks)

4. Based on the text, why might Hanukkah be described as a celebration of 'light over darkness'? (2 marks)

5. Why do you think it is important for families to have traditions like Hanukkah? Give a reason for your answer. (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a beautiful, glowing menorah with all nine candles lit, surrounded by patterns inspired by the dreidel game.

Extension challenge: Research how other winter festivals around the world use light as a symbol and create a comparison table with Nova the owl.