The Festival of Lights: Understanding Hanukkah

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

Use your knowledge of Hanukkah to answer the questions below. Think carefully about the historical story and the symbols used today.

Hanukkah is an eight-day Jewish celebration that commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. According to the story, when the Maccabees reclaimed the Temple, they found only enough pure olive oil to light the menorah for one day. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight full days. Today, families celebrate by lighting a special nine-branched candle holder called a Hanukkiah, eating foods fried in oil, such as latkes and doughnuts, and playing games with a spinning top called a dreidel.

Word bank: Menorah · Hanukkiah · Maccabees · Miracle · Dreidel · Oil · Gelt · Temple

1. Explain the significance of the number eight in the story of Hanukkah. (2 marks)

2. What is the difference between a standard menorah and the Hanukkiah used during this festival? (2 marks)

3. Why do Jewish families often eat foods cooked in oil, like latkes, during Hanukkah? (1 mark)

4. Max has £5.00 to buy treats for a Hanukkah party. If a bag of chocolate 'gelt' coins costs 85p, how many bags can he buy, and how much change will he have left? (3 marks)

5. How might the act of lighting the candles each night represent 'bringing light' into the darkest time of the year? (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a scene of a family table set for Hanukkah. Include a Hanukkiah with the correct number of candles lit, a spinning dreidel, and some golden chocolate coins.

Extension challenge: Research why the 'shamash' candle is placed higher or lower than the other eight candles on the Hanukkiah and explain its purpose to a partner.