The Festival of Lights: Understanding Hanukkah

Learning objective: I can retrieve and infer information from a text about the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

About 15 minutes. Grown-up tip: Discuss with your child why food is often used in different cultures to help remember historical events.

Read the passage carefully. For retrieval questions, look for specific facts in the text. For inference questions, use the clues in the text to explain your answer. Example: If the text says 'the room was bright', and a question asks how the room felt, you might infer it was cheerful.

Hanukkah, often known as the Festival of Lights, is a significant Jewish celebration that lasts for eight days and nights. It commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. According to historical accounts, when the Jewish people returned to the Temple, they found only enough sacred oil to light the menorah for one day. Miraculously, the small amount of oil burned brightly for eight full days, allowing time for more oil to be prepared.

Today, families mark this event by lighting the menorah, a special nine-branched candelabra. Each night, one additional candle is lit until all eight are glowing brightly on the final evening. The ninth candle, called the shamash, is used to light the others. During this time, families gather to share traditional foods cooked in oil, such as latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (jam-filled doughnuts), to remember the miracle of the oil. Children often play games with a spinning top called a dreidel, and it is common for relatives to exchange small gifts or ‘gelt’, which are chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil. The festival is a time of joy, gratitude, and reflection on the importance of freedom and faith, bringing light and warmth into homes during the cold winter months.

Word bank: miracle · dedication · tradition · menorah · celebration

1. Identify two traditional foods mentioned in the text that are eaten during Hanukkah. (2 marks) (2 marks)

2. How many candles are lit on the final night of the festival? (1 mark) (1 mark)

3. Why do you think families choose to eat foods cooked in oil during this festival? Use evidence from the text to support your answer. (2 marks) (2 marks)

4. Based on the text, how does the role of the shamash candle differ from the other eight candles? (2 marks) (2 marks)

5. Do you think Hanukkah is an important festival for families? Give one reason for your opinion. (2 marks) (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a menorah with all nine candles lit, surrounded by patterns inspired by traditional Jewish art.

Extension challenge: Research the symbols found on the four sides of a dreidel and explain what they represent in English.

I did it! Name: _____ Date: _____

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