

*Directions: Carefully read the selection. On the first word, circle words that are new to you and underline or highlight phrases that you think are important.*

### **HISTORY OF HANUKKAH Adapted from History.com**

The eight-day Jewish celebration known as Hanukkah or Chanukah commemorates the rededication during the second century B.C. of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, where according to legend Jews had risen up against their Greek-Syrian oppressors in the Maccabean Revolt. Hanukkah, which means “dedication” in Hebrew, begins on the 25th of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar and usually falls in November or December. In 2015 it begins on December 6th. Often called the Festival of Lights, the holiday is celebrated with the lighting of the menorah, traditional foods, games and gifts.

The events that inspired the Hanukkah holiday took place during a particularly turbulent phase of Jewish history. Around 200 B.C., Judea—also known as the Land of Israel—came under the control of Antiochus III, the Seleucid king of Syria, who allowed the Jews who lived there to continue practicing their religion. His son, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, proved less benevolent: Ancient sources recount that he outlawed the Jewish religion and ordered the Jews to worship Greek gods. In 168 B.C., his soldiers descended upon Jerusalem, massacring thousands of people and desecrating the city’s holy Second Temple by erecting an altar to Zeus and sacrificing pigs within its sacred walls.

Led by the Jewish priest Mattathias and his five sons, a large-scale rebellion broke out against Antiochus and the Seleucid monarchy. When Matthathias died in 166 B.C., his son Judah, known as Judah Maccabee (“the Hammer”), took the helm; within two years the Jews had successfully driven the Syrians out of Jerusalem, relying largely on guerilla warfare tactics. Judah called on his followers to cleanse the Second Temple, rebuild its altar and light its menorah—the gold candelabrum whose seven branches represented knowledge and creation and were meant to be kept burning every night.

## **THE HANUKKAH “MIRACLE”**

According to the Talmud, one of Judaism’s most central texts, Judah Maccabee and the other Jews who took part in the rededication of the Second Temple witnessed what they believed to be a miracle. Even though there was only enough untainted olive oil to keep the menorah’s candles burning for a single day, the flames continued flickering for eight nights, leaving them time to find a fresh supply. This wondrous event inspired the Jewish sages to proclaim a yearly eight-day festival.

## **HANUKKAH TRADITIONS**

The Hanukkah celebration revolves around the kindling of a nine-branched menorah, known in Hebrew as the hanukiah. On each of the holiday’s eight nights, another candle is added to the menorah after sundown; the ninth candle, called the shamash (“helper”), is used to light the others. Jews typically recite blessings during this ritual and display the menorah prominently in a window as a reminder to others of the miracle that inspired the holiday.

In another allusion to the Hanukkah miracle, traditional Hanukkah foods are fried in oil. Potato pancakes (known as latkes) and jam-filled donuts (sufganiyot) are particularly popular in many Jewish households. Other Hanukkah customs include playing with four-sided spinning tops called dreidels and exchanging gifts. In recent decades, particularly in North America, Hanukkah has exploded into a major commercial phenomenon, largely because it falls near or overlaps with Christmas. From a religious perspective, however, it remains a relatively minor holiday that places no restrictions on working, attending school or other activities.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Individual Reading Worksheet

### Vocabulary

*Identify 4 words from the reading that you previously did not know. Define each word.*

Word	Definition

### Questions

1. What place is also known as “the Land of Israel”?
2. What did the Prince of Syria, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, order the Jews to do?
3. Why do you think that sacrificing pigs was a way to desecrate the Temple?
4. How long did it take for Judah Maccabee and his army to drive the Syrians out of Jerusalem?
5. What is a menorah and what do its branches represent?
6. What is the Hanukkah Miracle?
7. How is Hanukkah celebrated today?

## Partner Discussion Worksheet

### Vocabulary

*Copy 3 different words and definitions from your partner.*

Word	Definition

### Questions

*Read and compare your answers to your partner's and discuss any uncertainties in your responses.*

*Note differences in responses here:*

Write 2 new questions from the text. Discuss with your partner and record answer.

Question	Answer