



Teachers' Notes

Living a Jewish life in Britain today: Internet research task

Aim: To get children thinking about how Jewish religious requirements impact on life.

This task requires access to the Internet

Sometimes it is easy to give the impression that the Jewish tradition is rule bound and a burden. There is an incredible amount of diversity of practice within the Jewish community so not everyone is living the Jewish life often seen in textbooks. For Jews who do follow Jewish law strictly this is not seen as a burden. When you have grown up with something it is just what you do. It can also be a sign of the importance of your beliefs when you follow a lifestyle that is different to the majority culture.

Synagogues

In Box 1, students will be trying to find out where their nearest Synagogue is. This can be done via Google maps. They may need to visit individual synagogue websites to find out what type of Synagogue they are. Sometimes it is clear from the title, e.g., Nottingham Liberal Synagogue, but sometimes it isn't.

The main synagogue organisations in Britain are:

- Orthodox
 - The United Synagogue
 - The Federation of Synagogues
 - Chabad
 - Spanish and Portuguese Synagogues
- Progressive
 - Masorti Judaism (Conservative)
 - Reform Judaism
 - Liberal Judaism

There are many independent synagogues that could be Orthodox or Progressive in character.

Kosher food

There is huge diversity in the following of Kosher food rules. Orthodox Jews usually keep kosher strictly and would require access to certified Kosher foods. Meat would also have to be Kosher.

In Progressive communities, you will find a large variety of practice. Some keep Kosher strictly while others don't keep it at all. Many will avoid non-Kosher foods but will not require Kosher certification. If the ingredients are all allowed by Jewish tradition, then they are happy to eat it. Some progressive Jews are willing to eat Halal meat which is killed in a similar way. Others will eat meat from the supermarket if it isn't from a pig. Vegetarianism and Veganism are also popular as it is with many in Britain today.

This task asks children to put their favourite products into the "Is it Kosher?" Website. This website assesses manufactured products and looks for a Kosher certification (Hechser)

Jewish Schools

Some Jewish families like to send their children to Jewish schools. Discuss with the children why this is before they look for schools in their area:

- They want education to reflect Jewish values
- They want any prayers said to be Jewish ones. Many schools in the UK have a Christian character and are run by churches. This would mean Jewish children have to sit out of assembly.
- They want their children to make friends with other Jews.
- They may be concerned about anti-Jewish prejudice. Being the only Jew in a school can make some people feel vulnerable.
- They want their children to have Jewish festivals off school without having to miss lessons. Jewish schools completely shut over festivals.

Some Jews prefer their children to go to non-Jewish schools so that they can learn about other communities. Also, Jews are a tiny minority in Britain so once they go to university or work, they will spend more time with non-Jews and some Jewish families would rather prepare their children for this.

Think about your area

This activity asks children to think about how easy it would be to live a traditional Jewish lifestyle in the area they live in.

Discuss the following before the children write up their answer:

- Many traditional Jews choose to live in Jewish areas as this is easier.
- However, some have long links to old regional communities or move through work
- They will make adaptations such as having a large chest freezer and filling it with Kosher meat purchased on a trip to a Jewish population centre
- Some may make pragmatic decisions, e.g., it is better to drive to Synagogue than to not go

Jews who live in areas with few Jews will make adaptations such as:

- Adapting Kosher food rules by following a vegetarian diet
- Buying food that is kosher by definition but not checked by a Rabbi
- Forming Jewish social groups with the Jews in their area. Regular Friday night dinners are a nice way of keeping contact with traditions even if a synagogue is far away.
- Visiting family in major population centres during festivals
- Taking part in online activities