

## LESSON PLAN

# Antisemitism and Sports: Understanding Jewish Identity Through Sport

*Compelling Question: How have sports provided opportunities to explore identity?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Competencies
K-2	3-5	50 minutes	Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language
MS	HS		



## Web Related Connections

### Lesson Plans

[Ruining the Game: Antisemitism in Sports](#)

[Antisemitism Around the World: Global 100](#)

[On the Rise: Antisemitism in Europe](#)

[Antisemitism and Sports Unit](#)

### Other Resources

[Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#)

[Athletes and Activism](#)

[Believe in Something: Nike, Kaepernick and Social Change](#)

[Major League Baseball and the Negro League: Correcting an Injustice](#)

### Key Words

Culture  
Identity  
Diversity  
Inclusion  
Ethnicity  
Multicultural  
Equality  
Religion

## LESSON OVERVIEW

The role of sports and organized athletics is most often considered to benefit society and elevate our shared experience as a culture or nation. Throughout history, sports have been a means of recreation, social interaction, communal and national pride, and recently, a growing economic enterprise. Sports have played an essential role in the construction and reshaping of social identity. While sports have offered the promise of social mobility and opportunity to marginalized groups, sport can also be a vehicle for harmful elements in society like racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination such as antisemitism.

By exploring the stories of Jews and sports, we can learn their story but also, we can learn the story of the Jewish people. These stories illuminate Jewish peoplehood, religion and culture through the practices and values of these athletes and sports personalities that we idolize for their performance on the field. Antisemitism relies on providing false myths and stereotypes about the Jewish people. The athletes and teams that we look up to provide us with narratives to learn about and ultimately reject these false projections about the Jewish people. In this lesson, students will explore these diverse narratives and apply that knowledge to examine the connection between Identity, Society and Sports.

**[Pedagogy Note:** This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn about antisemitism and how it manifests and sports. This lesson should be preceded by the lesson *Antisemitism and Sports - Manifestations of Antisemitism* and followed by *Antisemitism and Sports – Antisemitism, Sports, and Society* as part of a mini unit. If conducting this lesson in isolation, be sure to provide and/or review information that helps the learner recognize Jewish identity through the lens of peoplehood, religion, and culture.]

**[Note to Teacher:** It is important to consider that you may have students in your classroom who are Jewish. Be prepared and sensitive to those students, considering the extent to which they are a minority or majority of your classroom, and plan accordingly. Some students who are Jewish may feel relieved and comfortable discussing these issues in class and others may feel nervous, uncomfortable, or angry to be talking about a sensitive topic. You may want to communicate with those students in advance and determine how they can discuss this topic while feeling comfortable and safe.]

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will define identity, society, and sport to analyze their connected relationship.
- Students will examine Jewish identity through the lens of peoplehood, religion, and culture.
- Students will explore narratives of Jewish athletes throughout history to embrace diverse experiences of Jewishness and connected identities.
- Students will increase their understanding of the links between identity and bias.

## MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- Paper
- Pens
- Large Post It Notes or Chart Paper
- Supplemental Resource: “[Definitions of Identity, Society and Sport](#)” (1 per person)
- Supplemental Resource: “[Who are the Jewish People?](#)” handouts (1 per group)
- Room Setup
  - Arrange the Supplemental Resources to be displayed on the chart paper around the room so the participants can engage with them in small groups that will rotate.

## PROCEDURES

### Information Sharing: What is Identity, Society and Sport? (5 – 10 Minutes)

*[Pre-write the three questions on the board: What is identity? What is society? What is sport?]*

1. Welcome students and invite them to take out scratch paper for notes throughout the lesson.
2. Ask students: *What is identity? What is society? What is sport?*
3. Ask students to write down what comes to mind when you say those three words.
4. Once students have had a 2 –3 minutes to reflect, ask students to write down their responses to the following questions
  - How do you define each word?
  - What does it mean to you?
  - How do sports – both as a fan and a participant – connect with identity?
5. Invite students to form pairs to share their responses. Allow up 1 minute for the first student to share, then instruct students to switch speakers to allow the second student to share.
6. Reconvene the full group. Elicit a few student responses to each question aloud.

### Information Sharing: Who are the Jewish People? (30 - 35 Minutes)

*[At this point, the handouts “Who are the Jewish People?” should be placed up around the room so student groups can participate in the “Think-Pair-Share” interactive]*

1. Have students count off 1 to 5 to form five groups. Instruct students that they will have 10 minutes to explore the handouts “Who are the Jewish People?” with two minutes at each station. Frame the activity by discussing that to understand Jewish identity, it is important to examine the roles of identity, ethnicity, and religion, and how they relate to each other.

2. Before directing groups to their starting station, communicate the directions.
  - a. Each group will read what is posted and designate a recorder who will write the group's responses to the questions below and any additional reflections on the chart paper or white board.
 

*(For individual student accountability, you may also have the students record their own responses on a worksheet or put their initials below what they wrote. Having different colored markers for each student is also an option.)*
  - b. The reflection questions are:
    - What did you learn about the Jewish people?
    - What does this athlete's story tell us about identity, sports and belonging?
3. Have students return to their first station to read the collected responses from other groups. Allow about 5-7 minutes for students to engage in a gallery walk and view all the responses.

### Debrief Discussion and Closing (10 Minutes)

1. Direct students to return to their seats to reflect on their learning experience.
2. Ask the students to reflect on the following questions and debrief in a conversation
 

*[This set of questions is intended for Jewish groups. These questions are intended to help guide the student to connect their own experience with the narratives they have just learned about.]*

  - a. What does it sound like when you discuss your Jewish identity?
  - b. What does it feel like when you discuss your Jewish identity?
  - c. In what spaces do you feel as if you can really be your full, authentic Jewish self? In what places do you feel like you don't fully belong as a Jew?
  - d. What different perspectives did you learn about Jewish identity from others or from reading the stories?
  - e. What fears/concerns do you have when it comes to your Jewish identity?
  - f. Do you find any connections between your Jewish Identity and sports or your Jewish Identity and the stories of Jewish athletes?

*[This set of questions is intended for general audiences. These questions are intended to guide the student to connect ideas about sports and society with the narratives they have just learned about]*

- a. What does it mean to have an inclusive society? What does it mean to have an inclusive sports society?
  - b. What are the potential impacts on individuals who may feel that they must hide or feel shame or embarrassment about an aspect of their identity?
  - c. What are the potential impacts on other members of the school or community?
  - d. How can you provide support or be an ally for someone who feels compelled to hide an aspect of their identity?
3. Invite the students back together to share some of their answers aloud.

### Additional Reading and Resources

- [“Jews and Sports”](#) (My Jewish Learning)
- [“How Soccer Explains the World”](#) (Franklin Foer)
- [“Hank Greenberg”](#) (Jewish Virtual Library)
- [“A Timeline of Jewish Basketball Star Sue Bird’s Legendary Career”](#) (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 12 Sept. 2022)

## Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
<p>R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</p> <p>R4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.</p> <p>R7: Integrate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text with a version of that information expressed visually (e.g., in a flowchart, diagram, model, graph, or table).</p>
Writing
<p>W9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis reflection, and research.</p>
Language
<p>L1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.</p> <p>L3: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.</p> <p>L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies</p> <p>L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p>L6: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.</p>

## CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
<p>Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.</p>
<p>Self-Management: The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.</p>
<p>Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, &amp; contexts.</p>



# Who are the Jewish People?

*[Note to Instructor: One set of these posters should be set up around the room]*

# Hakoah Vienna



# Hakoah Vienna

No different than other ethnic groups, sport and organized athletics were a part of many Jews lived experiences. Muscular Judaism is a term coined by Max Nordau, inspired the founders of Hakoah Vienna, a Viennese sports club especially well known for its football team.<sup>1</sup> Hakoah, Hebrew for “the strength”, was one of Europe's most successful teams at its height in the mid-1920s. Hakoah achieved many notable achievements, including a victory over West Ham United, the first by a continental European side over an English side in England. However, their greatest moment came at the conclusion of the 1924-25 season. During a match to clinch the Austrian title, Alexander Fabian, the goalkeeper for Hakoah, broke his arm in a collision. In the 1920s, there were no substitutions allowed in soccer, so Fabian elected to put his arm in a sling and swap positions with an outfield player. Fabian scored the winning goal as Hakoah secured the title.

<sup>1</sup>Foer, Franklin. *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization*. HarperCollins, 2010.

# Eli Dasa



# Eli Dasa

After the foundation of the State of Israel, many Jews from diaspora communities made *Aliyah*<sup>2</sup> to Israel. Many of these Jews traveled to Israel by choice, but others came to Israel fleeing violence. One of these communities was Ethiopian Jewry, also referred to as Beta Israel. Eli Dasa is one such example of these immigrants. The son of Ethiopian immigrants to Israel, Dasa was born in Netanya and began a career as a footballer for Beitar Jerusalem and Maccabi Tel Aviv. Dasa became only the second Ethiopian-Israeli to represent the national team. Dasa became the first Ethiopian-Israeli to captain Israel and currently serves as the standing Vice-Captain and one of Israel's most notable players.

<sup>2</sup>Hebrew for going up and historically used in reference to Jewish immigration to Israel

# Hank Greenberg



# Hank Greenberg

Hank Greenberg was the first Jewish baseball superstar<sup>3</sup>, and, as a symbol of pride, one of the most important Jews in America during the 20th Century. While playing for Detroit in 1934, he drew national attention by refusing to play on Yom Kippur despite the Tigers being involved in a pennant race. Fans and rabbis debated whether Greenberg, who by his accomplishments on the field was winning acceptance for Jews among non-Jewish Americans, should play on the High Holy Days. Greenberg came up with his own compromise: He played on Rosh Hashanah and hit two home runs that won the game, 2-1; ten days later, he spent Yom Kippur in a synagogue, and the Tigers lost. Greenberg later became the first Jewish general manager and the first Jewish player to be elected to Major League Baseball's Hall of Fame.

<sup>3</sup> Feldberg, Michael. *Hank Greenberg*, Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hank-greenberg>.

# Sue Bird



# Sue Bird

Sue Bird represents many of these interwoven experiences for American Jews. Bird's family was originally *Boorda* before changing their name to Bird after arriving in the United States from Ukraine. She is the product of an interfaith family, and she recounts a childhood that wasn't very religious in terms of weekly practice saying, "I did Christmas stuff just as much as I did Hanukkah stuff. I didn't go to church, I didn't go to temple, I wasn't baptized, I didn't have a bat mitzvah or anything like that, but I still had doses of both religions...I don't necessarily identify one way or the other, I have both inside of me"<sup>4</sup>. Bird has become one of the greatest WNBA players of all time. Her accomplishments are vast but highlighted by her 4 WNBA titles, 13 WNBA All Star appearances and her 5 Olympic Gold Medals representing the United States. Despite representing the United States, Bird acquired Israeli citizenship in 2006 and has spoken about the opportunity that has given her to connect with that part of her identity. Like many American Jews, Bird has also taken on advocacy roles in her work. Bird has been an advocate, along with the rest of the WNBA, on issues of racial justice as well as LGBTQ+ advocacy as an openly gay athlete.

<sup>4</sup> Gurvis, Jacob. "A Timeline of Jewish Basketball Star Sue Bird's Legendary Career." *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 12 Sept. 2022, <https://www.jta.org/2022/09/09/sports/a-timeline-of-jewish-basketball-star-sue-birds-legendary-career>.

# Jewish Identity

- Identity can be defined as the qualities, beliefs, etc. that make a particular person or group different from others.
- Ethnicity refers to a person's identification with a group based on characteristics such as shared history, ancestry, geographic and language origin, and culture.
- Religion is an organized system of beliefs, observances, rituals and rules used to worship a god or group of gods.
- An ethnoreligion is a grouping of people who are unified by a common religious and ethnic background.
- The Jewish people share both an ethnic and religious background, making them an ethnoreligious group.
- Jewish identity is the self-perception that one is part of the Jewish community, which can be thought of as inclusive of or separate from a Jewish religious identity.
- Jewish identity can consist of: Jewish Peoplehood, Jewish Religion and Jewish Culture.

# Jewish Peoplehood

- Jewish peoplehood is an ethnic identity connected to the land of Israel composed of different identities that were created by the Diaspora.
- The origin story of the Jewish people is retold in Tanakh, referred to outside of Judaism as The Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament.
- The Tanakh refers to a distinctive Jewish people identified as “Israelites.”
- Around 1000 CE, 12 tribes of descendants of Abraham’s son Jacob, who was renamed Israel, came together to form the Kingdom of Israel.
- The kingdom was eventually split into two, the Kingdom of Israel made up of 10 tribes in the North and the Kingdom of Judah made up of two tribes in the South.
- The Kingdom of Judah became a thriving civilization with a government, art and a common language, Hebrew.
- The kingdom’s culture was centered on Jewish religious practice that took place at the Temple in the capital, Jerusalem.
- Following the diaspora, Jews settled all over the world forming unique communities.
- Jews eventually developed national identities together with their non-Jewish neighbors, adopting these identities alongside their Jewish identity.

# Jewish Diaspora

- The Kingdom of Israel in the North was conquered by the Assyrians, forcing those 10 tribes into exile. These 10 tribes are commonly referred to as the “10 Lost Tribes of Israel”.
- This was one of many expulsions, as the Babylonian and Roman Empire also dispersed the Jewish people across the world.
- This scattering became known as the diaspora and communities outside of Israel are referred to today as being diaspora communities.
- As the Jewish people became connected to different geographical regions, different ethno-cultural divisions developed including Ashkenazim (Central and Eastern Europe), Sephardim (The Iberian Peninsula and other Spanish and Portuguese territories) and Mizrahim (Middle East and North Africa).
- Other Jewish communities around the world also trace their ethno-cultural identity to the original tribes because of this diaspora. Beta Israel, as the Jewish community of Ethiopia is referred to, traces its history to the Tribe of Dan who were expelled from the Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. Bene Israel, a Jewish community in India, also traces their roots to the 10 lost tribes.
- These ethnic subdivisions developed customs reflecting the communities they inhabited.

# Jewish Religion

- The Jewish religion is based on a set of laws and observances that are centered around the covenant between God, and the Israelite people and their descendants.
- The story of the Israelite people and this covenant is contained and retold in the Tanakh.
- The Tanakh contains three books: the Torah (5 Books of Moses), Nevi'im (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings).
- Together, these documents recount the origin story of the Jewish people and provide the rules and commandments by which one would live a religiously observant Jewish life.
- With a central belief in only one God, most scholars believe Judaism was the first monotheistic religion.
- The Jewish religion is often referred to as one of the “Abrahamic religions”. Abrahamic religions have Abraham as central to their observance.
- Other Abrahamic religions include Christianity and Islam, among others such as the Druze (another example of an ethnoreligion) and the Baha’l Faith.
- In Ancient Israel, Jewish religious life was centered around observances at the Temple. Two temples were eventually built in Jerusalem.
- The Roman Empire destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE and expelled the Jews from the land of Israel.

# Jewish Holidays

- There are many Jewish religious holidays that take place throughout the year that are central to Jewish religious observance.
- The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar which has different observance date annually on the Gregorian calendar used in most communities around the world.
- On many Jewish holidays, especially those of religious significance, observant Jews refrain from many activities such as work, using electricity or travel.
- Some primary Jewish holiday observances are:
  - **Shabbat**  
Also referred to as *Shabbos* in Yiddish, Shabbat is the Jewish Sabbath observed weekly beginning at sundown on Friday and concluding on Saturday evening after sundown. This holiday marks the seventh day that God rested according to the Jewish creation story.
  - **Rosh Hashanah**  
Beginning of the Jewish New Year and first of the High Holy Days, which marks the beginning of a ten-day period of penitence and spiritual renewal.
  - **Yom Kippur**  
The “Day of Atonement” marks the end of the Ten Days of Penitence that begin with Rosh Hashanah.

- **Sukkot**  
The week-long “Feast of Booths” commemorates the 40-year wandering of the Israelites in the desert on the way to the Promised Land.
- **Shemini Atzeret**  
“The Eighth [Day] of Assembly” observed on the day immediately following Sukkot.
- **Simchat Torah**  
“Rejoicing in the Torah” celebrates the conclusion of the public reading of the Torah (first five books of the Hebrew Bible) and its beginning anew.
- **Hanukkah**  
Eight-day “Festival of Lights”, also known as Chanukah, celebrating the rededication of the Temple to the service of God in 164 BCE. Commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the Greek King, Antiochus, who sought to suppress freedom of worship. Hanukkah is a minor holiday and there are no restrictions on work or travel during the eight days.
- **Purim**  
The “Feast of Lots” marks the saving of the Jewish people of ancient Persia from extermination.
- **Passover**  
The eight-day “Feast of Unleavened Bread” celebrates the Israelites deliverance from Egyptian bondage.
- **Shavuot**  
The “Feast of Weeks” celebrates the covenant established at Sinai between God and Israel, and the revelation of the Ten Commandments.

# Jewish People Today

- Culture is the patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, relationships, family roles, communication style, clothing, etc.
- Since the Jewish people are an ethnoreligion, Jewish customs come from their ethnic and religious identity.
- As Jewish people gained legal rights and entered secular societies across the world, Jewish secular culture also emerged.
- The Jewish people have not been represented by a unified society since the Jewish diaspora.
- With the Jewish people developing different ethno-cultural divisions due to the diaspora, separate Jewish culture also developed within those identities.
- In addition to cultural practices connected to the Jewish religion, other pieces of culture came from connections with the local communities they inhabited.
- Many Jewish people, such as those highlighted in this activity, are recognized for their cultural contributions not only to the Jewish people but also their local community.