

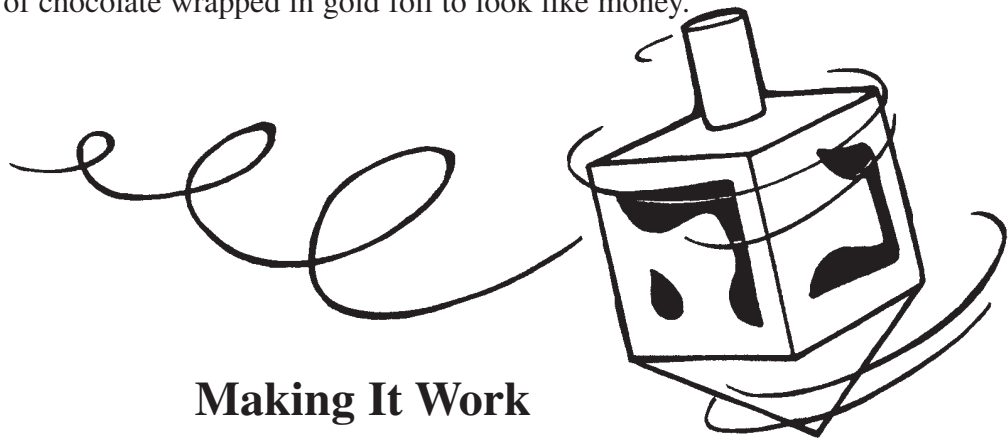
Hanukkah or Chanukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights

Sometime in December

The Jewish festival of Hanukkah, or Chanukah, is also called the Festival of Lights. It lasts for eight days and usually occurs in December, although in some years it may start in November. It commemorates not only the triumph of the Maccabees over the great army of the Syrian king, Antiochus IV, in 165 B.C., but also the universal message that all people have the right to be free.

After the Jews had won their battle, they went to their temple and found that the Syrians had brought in statues of their own gods. The eternal light had been allowed to go out. The Jews rekindled the light, but they had only enough oil to keep it burning for one day, and it would take eight days for a messenger to get more oil. The miracle of Hanukkah is that the oil kept burning for eight days, long enough for the messenger to return with more. Jews use a candleholder called the *menorah* to symbolize this miracle. It holds nine candles. One, the *shamus*, is used to light the others. They stand for the eight days that the oil kept burning.

Hanukkah is celebrated by lighting the candles of the menorah, playing games of chance with a spinning top called a *dreidel*, and eating special holiday foods such as potato pancakes called latkes. Children often receive a gift on each night of Hanukkah in addition to Hanukkah *gelt* (money). This gelt sometimes consists of chocolate wrapped in gold foil to look like money.



Making It Work

Invite a parent of one of your students to give a Hanukkah party in your classroom. This can be very simple or very festive, but it should include at least one traditional food, some gelt, and a chance to play the dreidel game.

If no parent is willing or able to give a party for you, you can easily give one yourself with the help of a Jewish delicatessen. Gelt can be purchased everywhere in its little net bags.

Buy inexpensive plastic dreidels for your students or have each student make his or her own.

Beautiful Hanukkah cards can be made easily. Fold blue paper into a card shape. Lay the cut-out shape of a candle on the front of the card. Lightly sponge thin white tempera paint over the entire front. Carefully lift away the candle. Allow to dry and write a message inside.